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POPULAR USES OF THE MARGIN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT REVISION.

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Any one taking merely a hasty glance at the Revised Old Testament must be struck with the recasting which the margin has undergone. A very little reflection will bring him to the conclusion that it was worth while paying special attention to this portion of the work of revision. It may even be regarded as a great position of vantage won by the friends of accurate Bible-study that the marginal notes are now inseparably attached to the English text. Whatever may have been the advantages of circulating the Bible without note or comment, it can hardly be claimed for the world-encompassing issues of the Bible Societies, that they gave to ordinary readers a correct idea of the true state of the text of either Old or New Testament, or even an adequate reproduction of its meaning. But it has most certainly been of unspeakable benefit to the English-speaking world that the authorized version, in its complete form, did contain a liberal margin. Its use in private and in public has accustomed us to think of uncertainties, obscurities and ambiguities in connection with the text; and the way has thus been prepared for at least an unembarrassing reception of a more satisfactory popular critical apparatus. Thus all Bible-scholars, however much they may be disappointed with the execution of the task, or differ with statements here and there, yet owe a debt of gratitude to the Revisers for their manifest appreciation of the necessity of a good margin, and their scrupulous care in fixing its limits.

The advantage of having a margin of any kind is strikingly illustrated by the difference in the treatment accorded to the German and English revisions respectively. Though the work of revising Luther's Bible extended over a long series of years, and was the subject of earnest study on the part of several specialists in the history and language of the famous version, as well as on the part of the immediate Revisers, and although the changes introduced were almost ridiculously few, and unchecked currency was continued to hundreds of palpable errors endeared or supposed to be endeared to the minds and hearts of the great German race, the opposition even to the few trifling alterations was vehement and overwhelming. Why? Because, as we cannot help thinking, the people had been led to associate the idea of finality and immutability to a version which they had been accustomed to see devoid of explanations, alternative renderings, and everything that might suggest to the popular mind the idea of uncertainty or ambiguity in the original. And yet many readers of the English Bible, including some who would call themselves students, are, it is to be feared, in the habit of reading merely what is printed in the body of the text whether in the old or in the revised version. How great a mistake and loss this habit involves may be inferred from almost any page. When an alternative rendering is given, introduced by the word "or," it may be taken for granted that there was great doubt

in the minds of the majority of the Revisers as to the exact translation of the word or phrase in question. The matter at issue is often, to be sure, one merely of form or expression, but more frequently, perhaps, the decision is made between meanings entirely distinct from one another. Now, it must be remembered that no reading was introduced into the margin at all unless it had the support of a large number of the Revisers, and that a translation which was preferred by a majority of the body was in many cases placed in the margin instead of in the text, on account of the two-thirds rule as to the admissibility of changes in the text. So it appears that if the majority or even a large minority of that learned company represented, as they certainly often did, the opinions of the majority of competent outside scholars, the renderings which appear in the margin in many cases would seem properly due to the text. In other words, unless we read the margin carefully along with the text, we are often accepting and building upon words and ideas which are really not part of the Bible at all. This unfaithfulness to truth is certainly not so great a sin against the light as the habit which seems to be still prevalent of treating the old authorized version alone as the *ipsissima verba* of inspiration; but it is bad enough. Let us hope that the increasing use of the new revision, as it carries its own witness to these most important facts, may win over its readers to the true stand-point and to right practice.

A capital gain will certainly be made for true Bible-study in the incentive given by the marginal notes to the cultivation of Hebrew. The fact of the necessity for so many alternative renderings and explanatory statements would itself suggest the importance of testing the points thus raised by the only valid process of a resort to the original expressions. To take an obvious example, it is not easy to conceive how any but indolent or insensible readers can pass over Ps. xxvii. 4, or xc. 17, without a strong desire to know how it is that the divine attribute which is of supreme importance to the Psalmists, can be so doubtful to modern interpreters. In these, and in a multitude of other cases, the investigation thus incited cannot fail to be both delightful and profitable; and even if the student should ultimately decide for himself that, in these and parallel instances, what stands in the margin should be put into the text, or *vice versa*, no harm follows, but only the great gain not merely of invaluable knowledge, but of a practical training in the most valuable of all sorts of biblical criticism.

The other most important feature in the margin is also much more valuable for what it suggests than for the information it directly imparts. I mean the indication of variant readings in the original text. This is of two quite distinct kinds: references to variations in the Hebrew, or the so-called Massoretic text, whether in manuscripts or in printed editions; and the mention of divergent readings in ancient versions which are supposed to be based on recensions or copies of the original differing more or less widely from the Massoretic standard. The former class, the variations in the current traditional text, it is unnecessary to emphasize here, since they are of very slight importance, the existing manuscripts being all apparently derived from but one copy. But the references made to the readings of ancient versions, few as they are, eminently deserve attention from all students of the Bible. At the risk of seeming to utter commonplaces, I shall state a few general facts about these versions. The most important of them are the Septuagint, or Greek version, made in the third and perhaps partly in the second century, B. C., the Syriac Peshitta of the close of the second cent-

ury, A. D., and the Targums, misnamed "paraphrases," written in the West or Jewish Aramaic, of which the earliest cannot have been committed to writing before the fourth century, A. D. The Samaritan Pentateuch,—that is, the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch in Samaritan letters,—would be of the greatest value if it were accessible in its original form; but in its actual state, it is only occasionally of much importance as an independent witness to variant readings. The pre-eminent value of the Septuagint is due to its antiquity, the number of its ancient manuscripts, the fact that it seems to be the only translation from a recension of the text older than the archetype of our present standard Hebrew Bible, and to the extreme literalness of the rendering in many portions. The Peshitta, while in the main following a text very near the Massoretic, shows occasionally surprising agreement with divergent readings of the Septuagint, as well as evidence equally striking of some kind of association with the Targums beyond kinship of language.

While it would be beyond the scope of this article to discuss the question of the condition of the received Massoretic text or the chances of amending it in the light of its own manuscripts, or of the versions, it is necessary, at the same time, to remark that the whole matter of improving the Hebrew original, and thus getting a more perfect Bible, is one of extreme difficulty. The work of amending by means of a collation of manuscripts of the Massoretic text would yield results of very slight importance, on account of the fact that all copies have been propagated from the same source, and because the variations among them are few and trifling. But even these results would be difficult to attain on account of the seeming impossibility of classifying the manuscripts, the difference of opinion that prevails as to the use of traditional evidence, along with the absence of any authoritative school of textual treatment. Doctors of the Old Testament text work usually without intercommunication or mutual confidence; and those whose opinions all would defer to may be counted on the fingers of one hand. The work of emendation by means of the versions, while containing far greater possibilities, is at present and will be for a long time to come encumbered by many obstructions. Trained critics are few; a critical edition of the Septuagint is still wanting, and there is no prospect of any being soon placed in our hands; and where agreement between the manuscripts, or families of manuscripts, exists, the question as to a decision between the readings and those of the Massoretic text is often most perplexing, and not likely ever to be satisfactorily settled.

The above leading facts with regard to these vexed but important questions have been mentioned here because it is of the first importance that all readers of the Bible should know in a general way how the Book which they use has come to be what it is, and what it is that it has come to be, as far as the outward form is concerned, and also because it is well that they should not simply take the work of translation or revision on faith, but have some intelligent idea of how the Revisers have fulfilled their trust. As to the latter point it is proper to say here that the Revisers have done well in so far as they have made few changes in the *text* of the English translation based on emendations of the Hebrew, instead of the many that might have been made with much show of right. Probably the number might well have been increased; but it was better to err on the safe side, and they were bound not to go beyond the average scholarship of the time, else their work would have made no headway at all. The next revisers will work on larger and surer inductions, and will come before a much better instructed jury of

their peers; though they too, if they are to succeed in their task, must not go beyond their commission.

As to the *margin*, it must be admitted on all hands that much more numerous various readings might have been proposed there based on the testimony of the versions. It is well, however, to remember that the margin, as well as the text, was made for popular use; and there will be no dispute of the proposition that, if the margin were to be made a complete critical apparatus, it would be unmanageable, forbidding and unpopular. Personally, no doubt, nearly every scholar would prefer that the alternative renderings, or references to non-Massoretic texts, had been much more numerous. But only those who have gone over large portions of the Hebrew text, and noted strictly the divergences of the versions, can have any idea of the number of changes which might properly be proposed if completeness were to be sought.

What then is or should be the popular use of such an incomplete digest of variant textual readings? The use is great and various.

It must not be supposed that, because any effort to secure at present a complete text of the original Old Testament would be without result, it is therefore useless for us to have anything to do with the more or less diverging ancient translations. We must not forget what a version for the people should properly be, and what our revised version aims to be,—a record of the concensus of opinion of scholars on all points that are practically beyond dispute. It must, therefore, be conservative in its authoritative statements. But it may or should suggest a great deal that is new to the people, in order that they may come to the true conception of the scope and the end of study of the Bible-text. And we must not,—nay, we dare not,—rest content with an admittedly imperfect text, but ever press on towards the ideal of perfection, even though it may at present seem beyond practical reach. Moreover, it is from Bible-readers among the people that the ranks of competent scholars are to be recruited; and the greater the number of investigators, the more sure and rapid will the progress be in the elimination of doubtful and misleading, and the access of approved and consistent readings. Above all, it must be taken to heart that such work, largely technical, is not the only end at least of the popular study of the versions, which finds its account chiefly in the suggestion of fundamental and moving general ideas.

In the first place, if Bible-readers will but consider the matter well, there must be a change of sentiment with regard to what constitutes exactly the Old Testament. The very fact of the revision and the popular discussions with regard to textual variations must have awakened ordinary readers to a practical sense that the authorized version is not the real Bible; and that of itself is a great gain. But the references in the margin to the Septuagint and other versions must still further enlighten thoughtful inquirers. The questions must suggest themselves: What authority has the Septuagint, or any other ancient version? How far do these vary from the received Hebrew text? What are we really to regard as the actual form of the Old Testament? The process that leads to the answering of these inquiries may lead to temporary unsettlement of views and some dissatisfaction; but these will be followed by a greater degree of satisfaction and mental repose than could have been enjoyed before the questions were started, since there is nothing that can permanently satisfy but conclusions based on tested and attested facts. As to the main question, the essential results of the inquiry will be as follows:—The Old Testament is a body of sacred literature given to the

world in the Hebrew language; and of this literature our present Hebrew Bibles are by far the best extant representative. Yet this Hebrew text, as we now have it, is not a perfectly accurate copy in all its words or in all its sentences or paragraphs; for the Greek translation, made more than three centuries before the current Hebrew recension was authoritatively fixed, while agreeing marvelously with the latter in general, departs from it occasionally in all the above particulars. It was also based, in the main, on a good consistent text; and the departures from the Hebrew are not due to the supposed fact that the translators had our text before them and purposely changed it here and there, but to the actual fact that they had another current recension before them, which, as a rule, they rendered with scrupulous care and fidelity, and, in large portions, with extreme literalness. Other ancient versions are also deserving of attention; but they do not cause any shifting of our point of view or any new change of attitude; for they are representatives of editions which follow the original recension of our own Hebrew text. Thus, the best available Hebrew Bible would be a successful "harmony" of the original of the Septuagint and the archetype of the Hebrew Bible of our Massoretic tradition. In this way the Old Testament becomes better objectivized to us than before; our whole view of the history of its transmission is classified and made more real; and the practical problem of textual criticism is defined.

It will, then, be readily admitted that a thoughtful and conscientious use of these marginal references must lead Bible-readers to a clearer apprehension of the character and form of the original Old Testament. Now what is the next natural consequence and practical benefit? Why, this, that students must begin to take an altogether new and direct interest in the ancient versions. The great body of those who intelligently study their Bibles will not only recognize the importance of the work of scholars who spend much time upon the ancient versions, but they will begin to think that they may yet reap some part of the benefit for themselves. Above all, the reading of the Septuagint must become more common and profitable. Indeed, the whole tendency of modern Bible-study is to push the Septuagint to the front rank as a companion-book to the Hebrew Bible. The prejudices against the Septuagint, on account of its supposed dependence upon the Hebrew when agreeing, and its assumed inaccuracy when disagreeing with the latter, are rapidly giving way; and along with this advance in critical soundness of opinion, there has come, for the relief of this noble monument of ancient learning and piety, that mighty revolution in modern taste and judgment, chiefly brought about by the science of comparative philology, through which men have been led to revolt against the exclusive domination of classical standards of literary excellence and worth, and have been brought to see and feel that the thoughts enshrined in any form of human speech are of infinitely greater moment than the style or special linguistic garb in which they are embodied. Thus, no self-respecting scholar would now plead, in extenuation of neglect of the Septuagint, that the Greek style is barbarous and repulsive. The determining question must be, Are the ancient versions worth reading on their own account, as supplementing in various ways our conceptions and knowledge of the old Hebrew Bible? The answer must come in the affirmative; and the certain consequence, sooner or later, will be that the versions will be much studied and compared. Fortunately for the progress of this branch of biblical culture, the most important of all the versions is written in Greek; and thus, even one who has no knowledge of the

Aramaic dialects can get for himself the chief benefit of this comparative study. Indeed, there does not seem to be any good reason why educated Bible-readers should not read daily a chapter or two of the Septuagint, and thus not only verify for themselves the few references made in the revised margin, but gain an insight into the genius of Old Testament style and expression, and a sense of reality and positive progress in biblical study which will prove to be quite invaluable. Not the least among the fruits of such reading and comparison will be a surer hold upon and keener appreciation of the biblical Hebrew idiom itself. What all Hebrew scholars feel in reading the Greek New Testament, with its Hebraistic syntactical coloring, will be felt much more strongly in habitual converse with the great Greek version of the Old Testament. One may thus look forward with confidence to a time not very far distant when the use of the Septuagint, in and out of our theological schools, will be as much a matter of course as the study of the Hebrew Bible, or at least that the cultivation of the former will more than keep pace with the increasing deference to the latter. It will not then have been in vain that such a scholar as Lagarde has spent the best hours of a busy life in gathering and sifting materials for a worthy text of a work which, after the neglect and depreciation of many centuries, is destined to rule in no small measure the realm of Old Testament study and research.

Such are a few of the advantages which the margin in the Revised English Old Testament is likely to bring to those who use it aright and heed its suggestions. I have purposely avoided, in this article, going into details of practical application, contenting myself with an attempt to encourage direct and sustained interest in a few broad principles of popular intelligent treatment of the two main representatives of the ancient Old Testament, the surviving text of the Hebrew original and the greatest and most ancient of the versions. With such a plan in view, minute criticism of the marginal notes is necessarily excluded. Moreover, whatever be the failures and the defects of the margin, it will be acknowledged by all who desire and labor for increasing accuracy and certitude in Bible-learning, that, if the Revisers succeed in directing more earnest attention to these great *principia* of Old Testament knowledge, such an achievement alone will be an ample vindication of the Revision.